

Finch-Fleischer House  
410 Monroe Street  
Monterey, Monterey County  
California

HABS No. CAL-1893

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PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
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PHOTOGRAPH-DATA BOOK REPORT  
HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

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FINCH-FLEISCHER HOUSE

Monterey, Monterey County, California

ADDRESS: 410 Monroe Street  
OWNER: Mrs. Alma Fleischer  
OCCUPANT: Mrs. Fleischer and various lessees  
USE: Residence

ARCHITECTURAL AND HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

The Finch-Fleischer House was built in 1870 by James William Finch, as a home for his mother. At her death in 1881, James Finch and his bride, Ellen Louise O'Neill Finch, moved into the house; their daughter, Alma (born 1884), now the widowed Mrs. Otto Fleischer, is the present owner and partial occupant. One wing and the upstairs are rented. Stylistically the house represents a type fairly common in 19th century California, combining modified classicizing elements with touches of the Victorian Gothic, and Italianate windows and doors. Its prim but elegant cottage character is echoed in numerous Northern California Mother Lode towns. The house is of wood with a shingle roof. Interiors are in part original, although practical modifications have been made to suit present uses. The right wing and portions at the back were added in 1881 and later.

HISTORICAL INFORMATION

James William Finch was born in Connecticut in 1830. He came to California with his mother and brother in 1854. Their first major stop was at a ranch in Jamesburg; later they moved to Monterey. By trade a stovemaker and iron worker, Finch also ran a fruit store.

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In 1870, he built the present residence, with his brother's assistance, as a home for their mother. In 1881, James Finch married Ellen Louise O'Neill. She had been born in New York City in 1845 and was brought to California at the age of two. Her father was James M. O'Neill of the Stevenson Regiment. In addition to his military prowess, he showed civic virtues; in 1853, he became Mayor of Monterey. An early member of the California State Militia, he was made Brigadier General in that organization in 1855 by Governor Bigler, and again by Governor Weller in 1859. The O'Neill family first lived next to the Serrano adobe on Pacific Street. During the Civil War, O'Neill served in the Union Army and the family moved to San Francisco. Later, they returned to Monterey, where Ellen Louise met James Finch. The older Mrs. Finch (James' mother) died soon after James and Ellen Louise were married, and the couple moved into the home that year (1881).

Alma J. Finch was born here in 1884. After the end of the Spanish American War, she met Otto Charles Fleischer who had a barber shop on Franklin Street. They married in 1903. A son Robert was born in the old family home on Monroe Street; he attended school in Monterey and later became a banker. Both husband and son are now dead. The widowed Mrs. Fleischer, in her eightieth year in 1964, still has vivid memories of Monterey at the end of the 19th century. She was a friend of many local notables; for a time, when the family went back to the Jamesburg ranch, the Monroe Street house was sublet to artist Charles Rollo Peters - famous for his paintings of Monterey. (His son, Rollo Peters, a well known actor, still lives in Monterey. Mrs. Fleischer recalls his French education and his then haughty condensation to use English on rare occasions only.) James and Ellen Louise Finch often acted in melodramas at the First Theater in Monterey, so the young Alma had a close connection with the local and national American stage through her parents and Rollo Peters. A grand-daughter, Nancy - the child of Robert Fleischer and Mildred Taplin of St. Helena - is now married to Dale Willoughby; two children of this marriage, David and John, are the most recent generation to visit their great-grandmother in the old Monroe Street house.

#### SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIALS AND SOURCES

"Echoes of Monterey's Past...", Game and Gossip, May, 1961,  
Vol. 11, No. 6, pp. 3, 20.

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Report by Natalie von Oettingen for course in American  
Architecture, University of California, Davis, 1964.  
Author's collection.

#### ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

This modest but most attractive wooden house was built largely of local materials, erected by men working with James Finch and his brother. Framed of wood, it is sheathed in horizontal siding. The shingled roof has been repaired and replaced as necessary; chimneys are of brick. Originally possessed of only a single wing (to the south of the main structure), it now has a more-or-less matching wing to the north added in 1881. Dormer windows on the main roof of the central block were added in 1910, in order to provide more light for the second story. The rear of the house presents modifications of the original design. The modest kitchen (behind the original south wing) was added in 1881; the kitchen behind the north wing (1881) is later. The balcony which serves the two windows under the main gable at the rear of the house (west) is made of the original fencing which once encircled the property.

#### EXTERIOR

The stylistic character of the exterior is created by relatively simple wood ornamental parts. The total effect is, of course, partly conditioned by structural changes and additions. The main block of house is surmounted by a steep gabled roof; the craftsmen gave this gable a pseudo-pedimental effect with strip moldings that suggest a raking cornice and the beginnings of the horizontal pedimental cornice - which here is at the sides only, and does not continue across either front or rear of the house. Like many Classical Revival houses of the Western Reserve, it is a practical form of the temple front - with space for windows under the gable. A true pedimental front would cut into such necessary windows. The classicizing character of the house is augmented by extremely tall Tuscan pilaster which frame the corners of front and rear in the two-story main structure. The handsome main porch and the porch in front of the original south wing combine various stylistic features. The supporting wood pillars are slender, tall Tuscan pillars of the simplest type. Linking

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the tops of the capitals of these pillars are flattened arches which suggest Tudor (in this case Victorian Gothic) sources. They are, however, of the simplest possible form and cannot truly be said to give a particular Gothic flavor to the house. On the main porch these flattened arches are in the form of wood "bars" bent to the appropriate shape and decorated discreetly with a pendant pointed ornament in the center of the arch's intrados. The arches rise to meet the frieze of the porch's entablature, leaving tiny open spandrels at each side above the arched wood "bars". The balcony-balustrade over the main porch is a plain type with squared piers topped by small wood urns superimposed over the pillars, and turned balusters. The general effect is Georgian, and is indicative of the survival of New England features into later 19th century California architecture. On the porch fronting the south wing, the flattened arch shapes linking the attenuated Tuscan pillars are formed from cut out shapes on the under side of flat boards. Thus, the effect here is related to the main porch but much simpler.

Windows and doors are stylistically interesting. Windows on the first floor (all windows are double-hung with four panes of glass - mostly original) have flat strip cornices above them and a simple board sill. Windows in the front gable (on the second floor) are French "doors" in type, with flattened raking strip cornices above. Both of these window cornice treatments are typical of simple Italianate buildings of the 1850's to the early 1870's in California. Shutters on the windows are original. The front door is the most pretentious part of the exterior, architecturally. This door, with characteristic mid-Victorian variations of 18th century paneling (there are two octagonalizing repeated moldings below and two elongated shapes with octagonalizing bottoms and round tops above), suggests a more expensive carved type of an older period. There are narrow glass side-lights (each consisting of three tall, narrow panes of glass) and a glass transom made up of two larger rectangular panes in the center and narrow panes at the sides. Framing the door and the glass are well proportioned Tuscan pilasters in wood. Above is a fairly "correct" entablature, with plain frieze (architrave and frieze are one board here) and dentil course and cornice above. This doorway is obviously closely related to Classical Revival doorways of the 1820 to 1850 period; it must have been lifted directly from some builder's manual of that era, or a door known to James Finch and his brother in Connecticut. A simpler door, framed with vertical boards and a strip cornice, occupies the north end (front) of the south wing of the house.

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## INTERIOR

Simplified plans of the interior were prepared by Natalie von Oettigan in 1964, for a student report at the University of California, Davis. (Original in author's collection.) From these plans and comments made by Mrs. Alma Fleischer, the following changes of interior disposition can be made:

1. The original interior plan of 1870 consisted of an entrance hall to the south side of the main portion of the house, with stairway to the second floor in this portion. To the north of the hall, at the front of the house, was a squared parlor; behind the parlor were two small bedrooms. In the wing to the south was a dining room and pantry (to the north and south of this wing); the south wing's porch door opened directly into the dining room. On the second floor there were originally three bedrooms and a bath. The stair rose into a hall which ran south-north rather than east-west as the first floor hall did; at the north end of this second floor hall was the bath. On the front (east) was a large bedroom; at the rear (west) were two smaller bedrooms.
  2. In 1881, the new north wing contained a single bedroom; at this time, the two smaller bedrooms at the back of the parlor were removed, and the parlor was enlarged. A modest kitchen was added to the west of the pantry, in the south wing. The second floor was unchanged.
  3. In 1910, and later, other changes were made - more especially during Mrs. Fleischer's widowhood to provide income from the house. The present interior plan adds a kitchen and porch to the bedroom in the north wing (at the rear or west of the bedroom). The former dining room in the south wing is now a bedroom and the pantry is a bath. On the second floor, the bath has been enlarged and the two back bedrooms have been converted into a study (south) and kitchen (north).
- Aside from these structural and plan changes, the house preserves much of its basic interior flavor although furnishings necessarily represent a variety of occupants and tastes. The present floors are of hard wood, but the baseboards, and strip moldings of gilded wood about eighteen inches from the ceiling, reflect the original

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wall divisions. The fireplace opening is of brick (now painted); stubby wood Tuscan pilasters support the rather awkwardly proportioned mantel - showing the rapid debasement of Classical correctness seen in the front doorway. An elegant framed mirror rises over the center of the mantel as one of the few surviving ornamental features of the Victorian era. Wall surfaces have been redone; the living room (old parlor) is painted light gray. There was a patterned paper in the original form. The first floor bedroom (north) also has painted paper walls, with plaster ceilings. The kitchen and porch of 1910 added to this north wing are extremely simple, with a painted interior. The only relics of older occupants here are the framed portraits of Mrs. Fleischer's grandparents in the hall, framed engravings belonging to Mrs. Finch (in the living room) and some family china.

Both the south wing and second floor have been progressively modified to suit more modern requirements of leasing or renting. Mrs. Finch's bureau and table are in the present second floor study. Old baseboards, and painted paper walls, however, often suggest the original house.

The original wood doors survive; they are "paneled" with two tall vertical sections at the top and two shorter rectilinear sections at the bottom. Framing consists of boards with outer moldings of numerous repetitions to properly set-off the door proper. Hardware is generally 19th century on the paneled doors. Glassed doors represent 20th century taste.

#### SITE

The Finch-Fleischer house stands on an eminence overlooking Monterey Bay; there are superb views from the second story balcony of the Pacific and all the shore activities of Monterey. Originally the property was 500 x 500 feet; the house was then surrounded by a painted wood fence. At the present the house is separated from the sidewalk below (front or east) by a concrete retaining wall with nine steps leading up to the front porch with its five wood steps.

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